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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

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Cover: Luca Cambiaso, Italian, 1527-1585, Hercules, Study for the fresco, Combat of Hercules and the Amazons. Sepia pen drawing, County purchase. P.291.57-2

AN EARLY DRAWING BY

LUCA CAMBIASO



NOT LONG AGO the Los Angeles County Museum acquired a forceful pen drawing which presumably because of the pronounced musculature, bore a useless attribution to Michelangelo. The subject of a powerful male nude in the violent movement of clubbing, it suggested the figure of Hercules most obviously. The subject is now borne out by comparison with two related drawings, recently published, which establish the identity of

FIG. 1
Luca Cambiaso,
Combat of
Hercules and
the Amazons,
fresco, Palace of the
prefecture, Genoa

our artist as Luca Cambiaso, and the work a study for one of his earliest decorations.

Luca Cambiaso was born in 1527 in Moneglia, Liguria, on the Italian Riviera. He was the son of a painter. The elder Cambiaso had as a prized possession an original drawing by Mantegna, and his son who early showed artistic talent, copied it, thus, the story goes, laying a foundation for his strength in modelling. At the age of fifteen Luca executed his first public work, chiaroscuro paintings on the façade of some houses, as was a custom in 16th century Italy. Two years later, at seventeen, he executed the imposing frescoes in two rooms in the palace of Antonio Doria all'Acquasola, later Spinola, and now the site of the Prefecture in Genoa. This was in 1544.

In the frescoes Luca painted the ceiling of the *grande sala* with Apollo dispersing the Greeks before Troy, sixteen arches with various mythological scenes, twenty lunettes with scenes from the *Iliad*. In the adjoining room the artist depicted the ninth labor of Hercules, wherein he combats the Amazons in order to obtain the girdle of their queen Hippolyta for Admete, daughter of the king Eurytheus. It is to this latter ceiling fresco that our drawing is related for it is a study of Hercules in the act of clubbing a fallen Amazon. He appears just right off center in the fresco (Fig. 1) his left arm stretched straight down to hold the Amazon's horse's head to the ground while his right is raised in back over his head as he prepares to strike the helpless victim. Massive women riders surround him, and Hippolyta aims her bow directly at him.

A drawing related to the Hercules,¹ formerly in a Swiss collection, is published in B. Suida Manning—W. Suida, *Luca Cambiaso* (1958), Fig. 10. The pen drawing, the size not given, shows Hercules in the

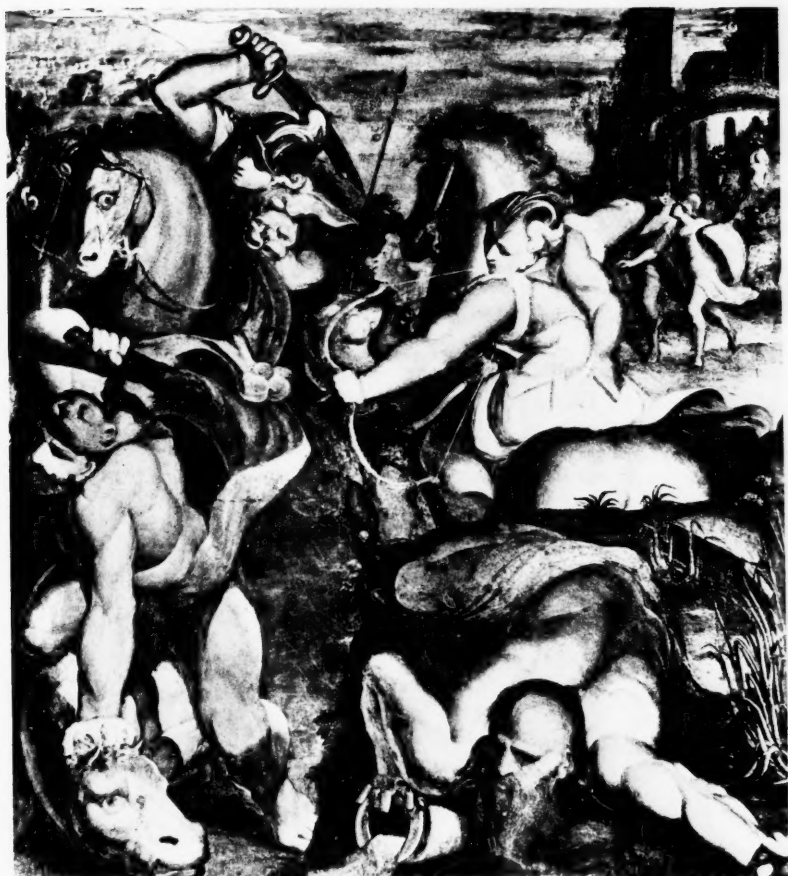


FIG. 2. Cambiaso,
Combat of
Hercules and
the Amazons,
detail

act of attack, but his left arm does not appear in the same position as in the fresco. Instead of forcing the horse's head down, the arm is extended freely, crossing before him to the right, while he is astride the fallen horse, as it were, from the rear. In comparison with the fresco it shows that Cambiaso changed his original conception of the striking Hercules or, if he had two (or more) preliminary studies for this motif, selected another.

The one he selected was obviously our drawing (see cover) for here the hero's pose conforms completely to the fresco. Although the outline of the animal is most summarily drawn, it can be seen that its head is indicated, and that a front view of the horse was intended. Likewise, the final position of Hercules' left hand appears as he forcibly restrains the animal beneath him. The motif of showing the hero as about to club the Amazon while controlling her horse with one hand suggests itself as undoubtedly a more dramatic conception than his movement of merely striding over the fallen animal to attack its rider. The Swiss drawing includes the flying chlamys of the fresco, which does not appear in our drawing, but neither drawing shows Hercules with the lion's head he wears in the final decoration.

Our drawing is thus of the position Cambiaso finally selected for his figure of Hercules in the fresco. Technically it is of great interest for the characteristics of the artist's early style. Cambiaso's drawings are the best known and appreciated expressions of his art. As has often been said, their distinctiveness is inimitable. His diagrammatic, cubistic reductions of figures are a hallmark of his draughtsmanship; so, too, the rapid brevity of his hooked and angular lines, the essential traits and modelling by wash which prefigures Tiepolo by two centuries. Everything in his drawing is broad, open, excited lineality, energy. His very early drawing, such as the one we are discussing here, as well as the few others connected with the fresco in the Palace of the Prefecture, are distinguished from his later draughtsmanship by longer, less definite and assured lines. There are capricious interweavings rather than the clear-cut geometry, sometimes schematism, of his more mature plastic conception.

The young Luca was especially under the influence of Leonardo

and Michelangelo, as the *Hercules* fresco reveals. The composition itself is reminiscent of Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, which the youthful artist has here exaggerated in his own details of movement, musculature, and extreme foreshortening. Earlier than his Bolognese counterpart, Pellegrino Tibaldi, Luca was already a Mannerist revolutionary who sought to contain and organize contrapostal masses of energy in space. He inherited the Lombard tradition of *quadrature*, or "science of space," originated by Bramante and Vincenzo Foppa. From this approach sprang the celebrated "cubism," or stereometric schematization of forms found in his drawings. Our early *Hercules*, with its convulsed intensification of Renaissance line, is more related to the monumental, tempestuous Michelangelo who was Luca's initial influence. The contrast between the impetuous freedom of the drawing and the tight contouring in the fresco may well be attributable to the hand of Luca's father who most likely assisted him in the painting,² but the fact is that a vast and consistent difference of draughtsmanship and painting marked Luca's work throughout his career.

The wild blots of ink in the present drawing are paralleled in another youthful design, *S. George*, in the Albertina (Manning-Suida 24). The artist's use of strong iron-gall ink which in many instances of his work has eaten away the paper along the lines of his pen, is a well known characteristic, the consequence of which has come to be accepted in numbers of his drawings. Our drawing does not manifest signs of this deterioration despite the many deposits of ink blots.

EBRIA FEINBLATT

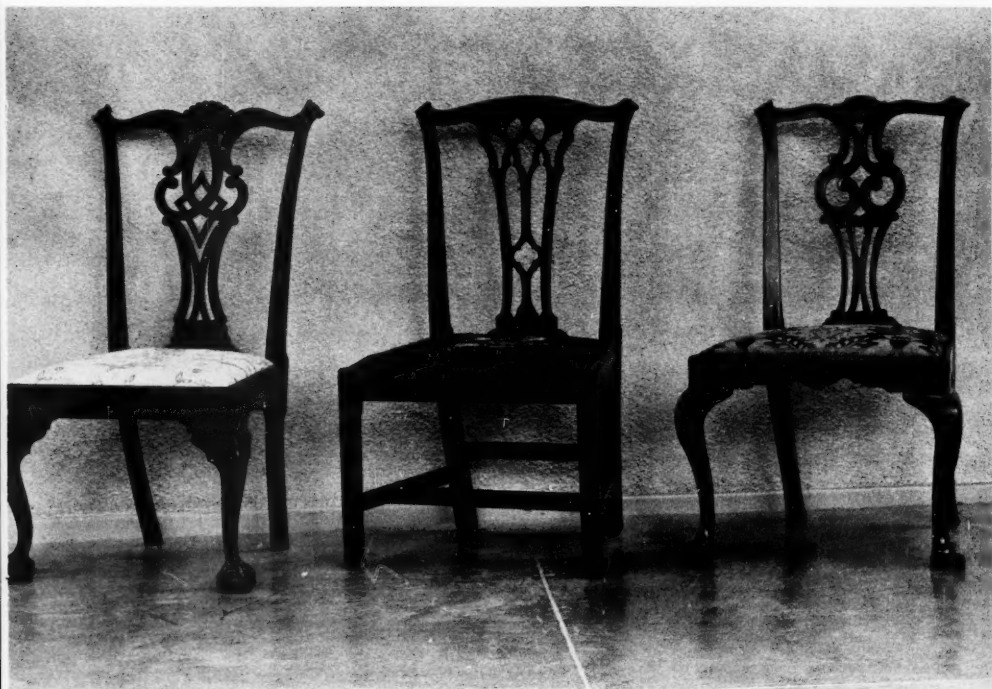
NOTES.

¹ Another drawing of Hercules, obviously of the same time, is in the Warsaw Museum. It was recently published in M. Mrozinska,

I Disegni del Codice Bonola del Museo di Varsavia, Venice, 1959, p. 97 (Fig. 76).

² P. Rotondi, *Appunti sull'attività giovanile di Luca Cambiaso*, Genoa, 1956, p. 23.

THREE AMERICAN CHAIRS



THE RECENT GIFT of a Chippendale chair made for an early Connecticut governor (illustration, *center*) brings to our growing collections of American furniture an opportunity for comparisons in the study of New England chairmaking. If the three quite different chairs pictured here would all be called Chip-

S
pendale, and indeed are somewhat indebted to the design books published 1754-62 by that enterprising London cabinetmaker, they were so much simplified and altered in the execution as to produce, if not an original and "new" American style, at least one that was un-English. No one familiar with the parent models could mistake these for English chairs.

The American society had no place for the luxurious and sometimes fantastic furnishings that suited great English houses of the mid-Georgian period—as Chippendale said, "the Most Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and Modern Taste" ("modern" of course meaning the French rococo manner). Ours was for most part a rural populace and village society. In all the colonies there were only five cities—Boston at this time (1765) numbering 15,000 souls, with 18,000 in New York, 10,000 in Charleston and 8,000 in Newport; Philadelphia had grown to 30,000 and in another decade would add ten thousand more, becoming the second largest city in the whole British Empire. One is surprised to know that the entire population of the thirteen colonies in 1765 could be contained in present-day Detroit.

For exceptional patrons, American craftsmen might occasionally produce "great" furniture like the shell-carved blockfront pieces belonging to Newport, the richly carved highboys and chairs of Affleck and others in Philadelphia, or the superb secretary desks of Boston. Our best American furniture was in no sense inferior to the English, for quality of workmanship and an eye to fine line and proportion. But the general demand was for designs in plainer taste, often made in maple or fruitwoods, and in cherry "the American mahogany."

Our three chairs are typical of what was seen at the time in the

nicest households. Two belonged to governors of Connecticut, and the third was appropriate to John Hancock's fine residence facing Boston Common, or to the Salem mansions of merchant princes. Each has a particular flavor; from peculiarities of construction and from regional differences in style that developed in a day when communication was limited, we might have told their origin even if these examples were without such well established histories.

1. THE CHAPIN CHAIR

MADE OF CHERRY, a local favorite, this lean and spirited chair¹ was supplied about 1780 to Major-General Oliver Wolcott (1726-1797). Born in East Windsor, Connecticut, he was a Signer of the Declaration, member of the Continental Congresses from 1775-83, lieutenant-governor of Connecticut 1787-95 and its governor 1796-7.

The maker was his townsman Eliphelet Chapin (1741-1807) who was born at Somers, and after cabinetshop training in Philadelphia arrived in East Windsor in 1771. Here he established his own workshop on "the Street" or main highway, married in 1773 and again in 1778, and was active as a cabinetman and chairmaker until about 1795.

Sometimes confused with Eliphelet is his second cousin Aaron Chapin (1753-1838) who came to East Windsor from Chicopee in 1774 and was trained in Eliphelet's shop. Aaron married in 1777 and the next year built a house next door to his master, but in November 1783 moved to Hartford where he afterwards followed his career, succeeded by his son Laertes (born 1778).

Characteristics of Eliphelet's manner are the height and spread of

his chairback (compare our third chair), the strong curve of its thin-ankled cabriole leg, and a vigorously carved ball-and-claw foot with sinewy talons. Evidences of Philadelphia apprenticeship are seen in the use of a plain rounded "stump" back leg, and exposed-tenon construction, where the siderails of the seat cut clear through the backposts; both of these were Philadelphia conventions. Also, the neatly curled scroll "ears" of his chair and a fan or sunburst cresting are simplified versions of the bolder volutes and shell carvings he had seen on fine walnut or mahogany Philadelphia chairs.

Eliphelet favored three designs for his pierced scroll splats—the one seen here, another the same but without the diamond or lozenge at the center, and a third pattern² of interlaced scrolls and latticing.

With splats of the second design, but otherwise in every respect an exact duplication of our own chair, a pair now in the Garvan Collection at Yale University³ were found in the 1880s by Irving W. Lyon, who recorded them p. 171 in his *The Colonial Furniture of New England* (1891). These came from a set of twelve made in 1781, which were billed by Chapin at a cost of £1 each.

2. BROTHER JONATHAN'S CHAIR

AGAIN the simplified expression of a Philadelphia type, our second chair⁴ is from a surviving set of three in mahogany, made c. 1770 in Connecticut. Here we have a fashionably newer style with pierced "Gothick" splat and straight square legs, though cabriole or "crooked" legs still continued in use.

These chairs descended in direct line from Jonathan Trumbull (1710–1785) who was governor of Connecticut from 1769–84. One

of his sons (Jonathan Jr., 1740-1809) also became governor, while another (John, 1756-1843) was the well known painter. Jonathan himself was on close terms with George Washington, who said he "took first place among patriots" and affectionately called him Brother Jonathan, a name by which he became generally known.

One wonders how the unidentified maker of this Connecticut chair came to follow the Philadelphia manner so closely? Excepting as occasional craftsmen moved from the coastal cities into back country and established themselves in offside towns, there was little direct influence from the fashionable centers. For a small town man like Chapin to have had Philadelphia workshop training and then return to his village was a most uncommon thing. However, a good deal of "venture cargo" was traded along the coast; New England cabinetmakers sent shiploads of furniture to southward coastal towns and the West Indies, while Philadelphia was exporting so many windsor chairs that this sort became known as the Philadelphia Chair. Since the broad Connecticut River was a highway from the sea, it is not surprising that Philadelphia models should find their way to inland towns here.

Brother Jonathan's has the typically low, broad proportions of a closely similar chair^s made 1760-70 by Benjamin Randolph, producer of the celebrated "six Sample Chairs," who worked from c. 1760-78 "at the Sign of the Golden Ball" on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Many other instances of this splat with "Gothick" tracery are to be found in chairs from the Quaker City during 1760-80, though mostly with the added refinement of carvings which our Yankee chairmaker thriftily omitted. Benjamin Randolph had access to the 2nd and 3rd editions of Chippendale's *Director* (1755 and

1762) at the Library Company of Philadelphia, of which he was a member from 1766, but the more isolated Connecticut craftsmen were innocent of such fancy notions.

3. MASSACHUSETTS CHAIR

OUR THIRD CHAIR⁶ is of mahogany, made c. 1760 and a rather more elegant Boston/Salem cousin of Chapin's. Its cresting rail displays a gentler curve; the back legs are squared, and faintly spreading at the floor; the shallower skirt of its seat is cut in undulating scrolls.

Here is the typical Massachusetts design for a pierced splat. While the scrolls of Chapin's chairback flow down from the cresting rail, cross each other and turn outward and up,⁷ in our third chair they curve out and turn inward, finishing as paired upturned volutes.

A curious but pleasant feature of our chair is its use of the Chipendale back in company with plain cabriole legs and pad feet left over from the Queen Anne style of a half-century earlier. In this marriage of two styles the New England makers saw nothing inappropriate, accustomed as they were to long survival of popular types, and to the grafting of "new" details onto accepted forms. Whether in cabinet- and chair-making or in silverwork, this development of hybrid types was accomplished with a nice eye for selection, and strange mixtures were quite successfully accomplished.

The same as in Joseph Downs' No. 152, a Massachusetts chair of the 1760s now at Winterthur, our own chairback is centered with the carved feature of an acanthus leaf on a star-punched ground, "the punched, snowflake background that is a hallmark of Salem

woodcarvers." Indeed, when the Winterthur chair was pictured, p. 42 of the *Antiquarian* for November 1930, it was captioned "probably the earliest effort of McIntyre in the making and carving of furniture." But since the chubby fist of infant Samuel McIntyre (1757-1811) was unaccustomed to the carver's chisel in 1760, nor did this famous "Woodcarver of Salem" embellish any furniture until about 1790, the credit seems rather farfetched.

GREGOR NORMAN-WILCOX

NOTES.

¹ A.1078.53-329, purchased from Denis Bequest funds for the Col. and Mrs. George J. Denis Collection. Height of back 38½". Pictured in the *Bulletin of the Art Division*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Summer 1954, p. 14.

² *Antiques* for April 1939, pp. 172-73.

³ Pictured p. 11 in *Antiques* for Jan. 1937.

⁴ A.7325.59-1, given in memory of John Trumbull Marshall. Height of back 38".

⁵ Joseph Downs, *American Furniture: The Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods* (1952), No. 142—a chair at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, matching one in

the Garvan Collection which carries Benjamin Randolph's printed label.

⁶ A.1078.54-361, purchased from Denis Bequest funds for the Col. and Mrs. George J. Denis Collection. Height of back 37".

⁷ The same pattern with lozenge center occurs on a chair signed and dated 1756 by Gilbert Ash, chairmaker "in Wall Street near the City Hall, New-York," and again in his six chairs (Joseph Downs, No. 149) made in 1760 for Sir William Johnson. The design was presumably carried to Connecticut by craftsmen who fled in such numbers during the British occupation of New York.

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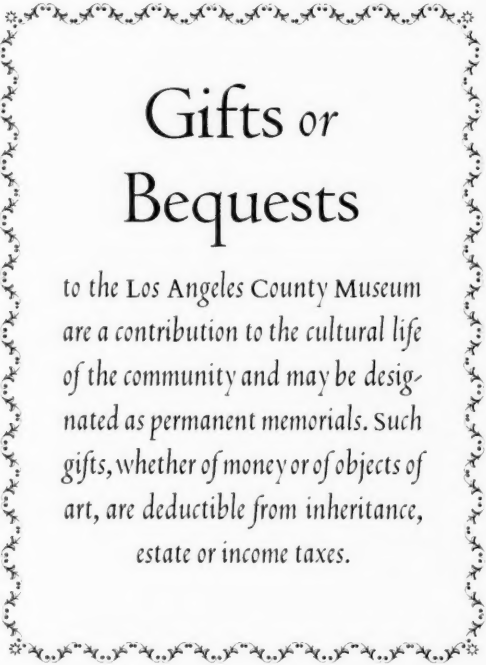
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